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1/77

29 JUL 2002

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1. Your reference

444.78321/000

2. Patent application number

(The Patent Office will fill in this part)

0217520.6

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

Borealis Technology OY

FIN-06101 Porvoo

Finland

30JUL02 E736965-4 D00027

P01/7700 0.00-0217520.6

Patents ADP number (*if you know it*)

79146(7001)

Finland

If the applicant is a corporate body, give country/state of incorporation

4. Title of the invention

PRODUCT

5. Name of your agent (*if you have one*)

Frank B. Dehn & Co.

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

179 Queen Victoria Street

London

EC4V 4EL

Patents ADP number (*if you know it*)

166001 ✓

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Country

Priority application number

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7. If this application is divided or otherwise derived from an earlier UK application, give the number and the filing date of the earlier application

Number of earlier application

Date of filing
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Patents Form 1/77

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Continuation sheets of this form

0

Description

12

Claim(s)

1

Abstract

-

Drawing(s)

-

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Priority documents

-

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-

Statement of inventorship and right
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Request for substantive examination
(*Patents Form 10/77*)

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-

I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

11.

Signature  Date 26th July 2002
 Frank B. Dehn & Co

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

Julian Cockbain
020 7206 0600

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Product

This invention relates to polyethylene shrink films and to processes for their preparation and their uses as
5 packaging materials.

Shrink films are polymer films which on application of heat shrink in one or both directions. They are widely used as packaging and casing materials for both large and small products (e.g. industrial pallets,
10 bottles, magazines, etc), generally with thicker films being used for larger items and thinner films for smaller items.

At present, the most widely used material for shrink film production is low density polyethylene (LDPE), optionally blended with other polymers to achieve a desired balance of properties (e.g. stiffness) and cost. LDPE shrink films may also include a coextruded polypropylene layer to reduce the incidence of fusion of the LDPE layer to shrink film wrapped
20 objects during the heat treatment to shrink the film. These commonly used LDPE or LDPE-rich shrink films however suffer from various problems. In particular the shrink film has insufficient mechanical strength for many end uses, the occurrence of hole formation during the shrinking process is undesirably high, and the holding force of the shrink film is undesirably low.
25

Recently, it has been proposed in US-A-5736258 (Union Carbide) to produce shrink film using a blend of copolymers of ethylene and C₃₋₁₂ alpha-olefins with a molecular weight distribution of at least 8, a density of 910 to 940 kg/m³, and a weight average molecular weight of 90000 to 225000D. The ethylene copolymers used by US-A-5736258 were produced by two stage Ziegler-Natta catalyst catalysed polymerization of ethylene and butene and of ethylene and hexene in two gas phase reactors and the resultant shrink films showed a shrinkage at 135°C of at least 60% in the machine
35

direction. These films however do not appear to be improved in terms of mechanical or shrinkage properties relative to the conventional LDPE films.

Shrink film is produced by extrusion through an annular die with a pressure difference applied to blow the extruded cylinder into a film and achieve the desired orientation within the film, i.e. to build a stress into the cooled film. Heat treatment results in stress relaxation and, as a result, shrinkage. Most of the shrinkage occurs while the film is at its hottest (generally ca. 120-130°C) during the heat treatment; however the film continues to shrink as it cools. These are referred to as the hot shrink and the cold shrink respectively and for a polymer to function adequately as the base material for a shrink film it must meet the different requirements (in terms of melt strength, cold strength and other mechanical properties) of the hot shrink, cold shrink and post-shrinkage stages.

We have now found that these requirements are particularly well met by linear low density polyethylenes (LLDPE) having a high molecular weight distribution (MWD) and containing a mixture of ethylene copolymers prepared by a two or more stage Ziegler-Natta catalyst catalysed polymerization involving a combination of loop and gas phase reactors. (The term MWD refers to the ratio (M_w/M_n) between the weight average molecular weight (M_w) and the number average molecular weight (M_n) of a polymer).

Thus viewed from one aspect the invention provides a shrink film comprising a polyethylene film, characterized in that said polyethylene is an ethylene copolymer mixture having a molecular weight distribution in the range 10 to 35, preferably 15 to 25, a density of 915 to 940 kg/m³, a weight average molecular weight of 150000 to 300000D, more preferably 170 to 280 kD, and especially 180 to 250 kD, and an $MFR_{2.16}$ (190°C) of 0.1 to 0.9 kg/m³, which copolymer mixture is produced by a

two or more stage copolymerization of ethylene and 2 to 10% mole (relative to ethylene), especially 4 to 8% mole of a C₃₋₁₂ alpha-olefin comonomer in a series of reactors including at least one slurry loop reactor and at least one gas phase reactor using a heterogeneous Ziegler-Natta catalyst.

In the shrink film of the invention, one copolymer component preferably has a higher density and lower weight average molecular weight than the other copolymer component. The higher density of the lower molecular weight component is thought to result in a more rapid crystallization of this component during the shrinking process leading to more effective tie formation in the film and to improved mechanical properties. Generally, the density of the higher density copolymer component should be in the range 945 to 980 kg/m³.

The shrink film of the invention may if desired be a multilayer film, e.g. incorporating a polypropylene protective layer as mentioned above, and the copolymer mixture layer may include other components besides the copolymer mixture, e.g. coloring agents, other polymers, etc. Generally however such other components will make up no more than 40% wt, more preferably no more than 25% wt, and especially no more than 10% wt of the copolymer mixture layer. However especially preferably the copolymer mixture layer contains no more than 5% wt of any further polymer.

In the shrink films of the invention the thickness of the copolymer mixture layer (i.e the thickness in the non-shrunk film) is preferably 20 to 500 µm more preferably 25 to 200 µm, still more preferably 30 to 120 µm.

The thinner films of the invention (e.g. < 70 µm thickness) are particularly suitable for wrapping relatively small loads, e.g. having a weight per package of 50kg or less, more preferably 10 kg or less. Examples of such loads include magazines, books,

bottles, sets of bottles (e.g. with 2 to 12 in a set), etc. The thicker films, e.g. > 100 μm thickness, are especially suitable for shrink wrapping large loads, e.g. of 500 kg or more.

5 The shrink films of the invention have particularly good properties not just in terms of their performance during the film shrinking operation but also in terms of the mechanical properties of the shrunk film itself. Thus the shrink film has a particularly beneficial combination of very low hot shrink force and very high cold shrink force. The low hot shrink force serves to reduce hole formation during the shrinking operation (a major problem with conventional shrink films) while the high cold shrink forces provide excellent holding 10 properties, i.e. they serve to stabilize the shrink-wrapped product. Moreover the shrunk film has mechanical properties (e.g. dart drop, and tensile strength) which are improved relative to conventional shrink films, especially at very low temperatures. As a 15 result the shrink films of the invention are especially suited for use in packaging products which will be exposed to low temperatures during transportation or storage. This combination of properties relevant to shrink wrapping is both unexpected and highly 20 advantageous.

25 The MWD of the copolymer mixture is a central parameter in achieving the desired properties of the shrink film. The required MWD of 10 to 35 indicates a broad range of molecular weights for the copolymer mixture. Preferably the MWD is in the range 13 to 25, especially 15 to 23. The high MWD is achieved by the use of both slurry loop and gas phase polymerization reactors, preferably in the sequence loop reactor then gas phase reactor, e.g. as described in WO99/41310. The 30 polymerization catalysts used in the ethylene copolymerization may be any Ziegler Natta catalysts capable of producing a polyethylene with the desired 35

molecular weight profile, in heterogeneous or supported form. Ziegler Natta catalysts capable of appropriate ethylene polymerization are well known and are described for example in EP-A-443374.

5 Where the copolymer mixture is produced as a bimodal polymer in a two-stage polymerization, the initial stage product preferably has a low molecular weight with a density of at least 945 kg/m³ (e.g. 945 to 960 kg/m³) and an MFR_{2,16} (190°C) of at least 100g/10 min (e.g. 110 to 3000 g/10 min) and the bimodal product
10 preferably has a density of 918 to 935 kg/m³ (e.g. 920 to 930 kg/m³), a MFR_{2,16} (190°C) of 0.1 to 0.9 g/10 min (e.g. 0.15-0.7 g/10 min), a weight average molecular weight (Mw) of 150000 to 300000 D (preferably 200000 to 280000D, more preferably 230000 to 270000D), and a MWD
15 of 10 to 35 (preferably 15 to 25).

Such a copolymer mixture may particularly conveniently be produced according to the technique described in WO 99/41310 using a slurry loop reactor followed by a gas phase reactor and with a density of 20 923 kg/m³, weight average molecular weight (Mw) of 240000D, MFR_{2,16} (190°C) of 0.2 g/10 min, and an MWD of 22.

In such a two-stage polymerization process, the 25 comonomer used is preferably a C₃₋₁₂ alpha olefin or a mixture of two or more C₃₋₁₂ alpha olefins, e.g. 1-butene, 1-pentene, 1-hexene, 4-methyl-1-pentene, 1-heptene, 1-octene, 1-nonene and 1-decene, with 1-butene and 1-hexene being preferred. The comonomer incorporation is 30 2 to 10% mole relative to ethylene, especially 4 to 8% mole.

For film formation using a polymer mixture it is important that the different components be intimately mixed prior to extrusion and blowing of the film as 35 otherwise there is a risk of inhomogeneities, e.g. gels, appearing in the film. Thus it is especially preferred to thoroughly blend the components, for example using a

twin screw extruder, preferably a counterrotating extruder.

Examples of further polymer materials which may be incorporated into the copolymer mixture layer in the shrink films of the invention include ethylene homo-and co-polymers, and high pressure (HP) copolymers (e.g. 5 ethyl butyl acrylate (EBA), ethyl methacrylate (EMA), and ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA) copolymers). Typically these may be included as up to about 40% wt of the 10 copolymer mixture layer, more generally up to about 25% wt, e.g. 18 to 22% wt.

The inclusion of polymers such as LDPE, EMA, EVA, and EBA may be used to balance the shrinkage behaviour of the shrink film in the machine direction (MD) and the 15 transverse direction (TD). Of these, the HP copolymers such as EMA, EVA and EBA are preferred as elasticity may be improved and impact strength may be maintained or improved.

The shrink films of the invention may advantageously be multi-layer films, e.g. laminates or coextruded multi-layer films. These multi-layer films may be produced by conventional techniques. The layers (other than the MWD 10-35 ethylene copolymer mixture layer) may for example comprise LDPE, Ziegler Natta 25 LLDPE, metallocene LLDPE, ethylene copolymers, polypropylene, and fabric. External polypropylene and fabric layers may be used to prevent fusion to or damage to the items being packaged by the shrink film. External layers of other polyethylenes, e.g. as mentioned above, are particularly preferred when high 30 gloss and/or low haze is desired.

The shrink film of the invention will typically be produced by extrusion through an annular die, blowing into a tubular film by forming a bubble which is collapsed between nip rollers after solidification. This film can then be slit, cut or converted (e.g. 35 gusseted) as desired. Conventional shrink film

production techniques may be used in this regard. Typically the copolymer mixture layer will be extruded through a die at a temperature in the range 170°C to 250°C, and cooled by blowing gas (generally air) at a 5 temperature of 10 to 50°C to provide a frost line height of 2 to 8 times the diameter of the die. To obtain balanced shrink properties, the blow up ratio should generally be relatively high, e.g. in the range 2 to 5. Moreover, the polymer will be drawn down, by setting an 10 appropriate difference between the the rate of the winder taking up the film and the polymer flow rate, so as to achieve the desired film thickness and longitudinal orientation.

The LLDPE layers in the shrink films of the 15 invention typically (for a 115 µm thick film) will exhibit impact resistances, determined as dart drop values, of at least 800 g/50%, preferably 900 to 1500 g/50%, and shrinkage in the MD (at 135°C) of up to 70%, e.g. 40 to 70% and in the TD of up to 45%, e.g. 20 to 20 40%.

The shrink films of the invention may of course be used to wrap or encase items, e.g. books, magazines, bottles, etc and this forms a further aspect of the 25 invention.

Viewed from a further aspect therefore the invention provides a process for wrapping an object comprising applying a shrink film about said object and shrinking said film by the application of heat thereto, characterized in that said film is a shrink film 30 according to the invention.

Viewed from a further aspect the invention provides an object shrink wrapped with a shrink film according to the invention.

The shrink films of the invention are distinguished 35 from prior art shrink films in their special combination of improved mechanical and shrink properties. The high density low molecular weight copolymer will have a

higher crystallization temperature and, during the shrinking process, will crystallize more rapidly than the lower density higher molecular weight copolymer. Thus during the film forming process a high degree of polymer chain entanglement will occur leading to increased toughness in the shrink film and to a highly oriented structure which provides improved shrinkage properties. Thus the films of the invention exhibit the following advantageous properties: low melt stress (low hot shrink force) reducing hole formation during shrinkage; high cold shrink force, leading to better holding by the shrunk film of objects packaged by it; improved mechanical properties for the shrink film, allowing more demanding (e.g. sharp edged) products to be shrink wrapped and/or allowing thinner films to be used (and hence allowing the amount of polymer wrapping to be reduced); and a matt surface. The matt surface of the film provides a non-blocking low friction surface without needing the use of additives to achieve such properties and makes it easier to handle the film and to open it during the film feeding step of shrink wrapping. The film is thus easier to use in automated processes.

The invention will now be described further with reference to the following non-limiting Examples.

Various terms and properties referred to herein are defined or determined as follows:

Molecular Weight Distribution (MWD): This is

defined as M_w/M_n where M_w is the weight average molecular weight (in Daltons) and M_n is the number average molecular weight (in Daltons). These are determined by gel permeation chromatography.

$MFR_{2.16}$ and $MFR_{21.6}$ are melt flow rates determined at 190°C according to ISO 1133.

Density is determined according to ISO 1183.

Calculation of the shrinkage in MD (machine direction/%)

$$\frac{L_1\text{MD} - L_s\text{MD}}{L_1\text{MD}} \times 100$$

- 5 Calculation of the shrinkage in TD (transverse direction/%)

$$\frac{L_1\text{TD} - L_s\text{TD}}{L_1\text{TD}} \times 100$$

- 10 Of which: $L_1\text{MD}$ = initial machine direction specimen length.

$L_s\text{MD}$ = machine direction specimen length after shrinkage.

- 15 $L_1\text{TD}$ = initial transverse direction specimen length.

$L_s\text{TD}$ = transverse direction specimen length after shrinkage.

Calculation of hot and cold shrink forces (MD and TD)

20 $S = F/A$

of which: S = Shrink stress (p/mm^2)

F = Shrink force (p)

$A = t \times b$ (mm^2)

25 $b = 15\text{mm}$

t = Average thickness out of three measurements on same sample (mm)

Impact resistance (determined on Dart-drop (g/50%))

- 30 Dart-drop is measured using ISO 7765-1, method "A". A dart with a 38 mm diameter hemispherical head is dropped from a height of 0.66 m onto a film clamped over a hole. If the specimen fails, the weight of the dart is reduced and if it does not fail the weight is increased. At least 20 specimens are tested. The weight resulting in failure of 50% of the specimens is calculated.

Puncture resistance (determined in Ball puncture
(energy/J) at +23°C, -20°C and -40°C)

5 The method is according to ASTM D 5748. Puncture properties (resistance, energy to break, penetration distance) are determined by the resistance of film to the penetration of a probe (19 mm diameter) at a given speed (250mm/min).

Tear resistance (determined as Elmendorf tear (N))

10 The tear strength is measured using the ISO 6383 method. The force required to propagate tearing across a film specimen is measured using a pendulum device. The pendulum swings under gravity through an arc, tearing the specimen from pre-cut slit. The specimen is fixed 15 on one side by the pendulum and on the other side by a stationary clamp. The tear strength is the force required to tear the specimen.

Film thickness profile (2-Sigma/%)

20 In the laboratory the film thickness profile is measured by a non-touchable (capacitive) measuring (sensor) system from Octagon Process Technology. From this measurement one can also get average thickness, min./max. thickness, standard deviation and calculated tolerances expressed as 2-Sigma.

Outside and inside friction (cof)

Friction is measured according to ISO 8295. By definition it is the resistance to sliding between two surfaces lying in contact with each other. A distinction is made between Static friction which has to be overcome at the moment sliding motion begins and Dynamic friction which persists during a sliding motion at given speed.

Example 1

Shrink Films

Four monolayer shrink films of 130 μm thickness were prepared by blown film extrusion using a conventional film extruder with a die having a diameter of 200 mm and a die gap of 1.0mm. Film blowing took place at an extrusion temperature of 200°C, a blow up ratio (BUR) of 1:3 and a frost line height (FLH) of 900 mm.

Film 1 was produced from two polymers blended in the single screw extruder of the film blowing line. 90% wt was an LDPE (FA 3220 available from Borealis A/S, Lyngby, Denmark) of MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 0.3 g/10 min and density 923 kg/m³ and 10% wt was HDPE (FL3450 available from Borealis A/S) of MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 0.4 g/10 min and density 945 kg/m³.

Film 2 was also produced from two polymers blended in the single screw extruder of the film blowing line. 80% wt was a high MWD LLDPE produced using the technique of WO99/41310 using a slurry loop reactor followed by a gas phase reactor, with a density of 923 kg/m³, Mw of 240kD, MFR_{2.16} (190°C) of 0.2 g/10 min, MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 22 g/10 min and MWD of 22 (59% wt of this was a low Mw ethylene copolymer of MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 300 g/10 min and density 950 kg/m³ and 41% was a high Mw ethylene copolymer of MFR_{2.16} (190°C) <3 g/10 min and density <905 kg/m³). The remaining 20% wt of the blend in Film 2 was an ethylmethacrylate polymer (EMA) having MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 0.4 g/10 min and a methylacrylate content of 25% wt. Film 3 was similar to Film 2 except the EMA had MFR_{2.16} (190°C) 2 g/10 min and a methacrylate content of 18% wt. Film 4 was produced from the high MWD LLDPE used for the production of films 2 and 3.

35

Shrinkage in MD and TD, impact resistance and tear resistance were measured as described above. The results are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Film	Shrinkage (TD) %	Shrinkage (MD) %	Tear Resistance (MD/TD)	Dart Drop (g/50%)
1*	36	74	3.2/6.6	475
2	34	66	17/21	1200
3	28	64	19/24	1145
4	26	62	18/21	1005

* comparative

In comparison the shrink films produced from ethylene copolymer mixtures produced by the twin gas phase reactor two stage polymerization described in US-A-5736258 showed significantly lower dart drop values, and tensile strengths (especially in the MD).

Claims

1. A shrink film comprising a polyethylene film, characterized in that said polyethylene is an ethylene copolymer mixture having a molecular weight distribution in the range 10 to 35, a density of 915 to 940 kg/m³, a weight average molecular weight of 150000 to 300000D and an MFR_{2,16} (190°C) of 0.1 to 0.9 kg/m³, which copolymer mixture is produced by a two or more stage copolymerization of ethylene and 2 to 10% mole (relative to ethylene) of a C₃₋₁₂ alpha-olefin comonomer in a series of reactors including at least one slurry loop reactor and at least one gas phase reactor using a heterogeneous Ziegler-Natta catalyst.
- 15 2. A process for wrapping an object comprising applying a shrink film about said object and shrinking said film by the application of heat thereto, characterized in that said film is a shrink film according to claim 1.
- 20 3. An object shrink wrapped with a shrink film according to claim 1.

